



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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I would say it is beyond dispute that a movement started in First Century Jerusalem spread to the entire world and has changed the world. Of course, that movement would be Christianity. That's a historical fact—it's beyond dispute. I would also say it's beyond dispute that at the center of that movement was the claim of a crucified and risen Savior. What can be argued today is whether or not that claim of a resurrected Savior is true.

Now you'll hear an unbeliever, or a skeptic say they don't believe because they need proof. "I need it to be proved to me absolutely to believe." You might hear some today say, "You know I'm not really a person of faith; I'm a person of science, and I don't think it lines up with science." Well there are a couple of things to think about. One: this idea that science always gets it right is a myth. Anybody in the world of science knows that. The reality is science is constantly discovering and rediscovering. The whole basis of science is they're constantly adjusting and correcting and discovering. There's a long list of things a hundred years ago we thought were scientifically true. Now with more modern equipment, with more research, we have to go back and say, "Actually it was not true;" science was off, and that science has to be corrected. We continue to grow and adjust and learn. That's not a put-down of science, but that's the whole point. Science is constantly growing and changing and correcting and discovering. But if someone says, "I need absolute proof to believe," that person believes that the resurrection of Jesus did not take place. So, I'd be interested to know, "What is your absolute proof? You've said you can't believe unless you have absolute proof, so you must have absolute proof Jesus did not rise from the dead. I'd be interested in knowing what that is." Some people would say, "Well, science has proven people don't rise from the dead," to which I would say, "Science has absolutely not proven that." Science cannot prove that miracles don't exist. That is clearly beyond the realm of what science can prove. I would suggest that the unbeliever or the skeptic has hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of beliefs that guide his or her everyday choices, and those beliefs are not based on absolute proof. They're not based on science; they're based on nothing more than their opinion. Most people, at the end of the day, their beliefs, their worldview really is based on nothing more than their opinion or the opinion of someone else who has influenced them.

Now I find that personally frightening—that as I travel the pathway of life, my most significant choices around which I would create a worldview, even my eternal destiny, would be based on nothing more than my opinion. So, the question that we're getting to be not just what you believe; it's why you believe what you believe. What is your source of truth? Well, that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 1. We're going to

pick it up in verse 12. It opens with the word Therefore, which is a reference to: based on the Gospel truth, these wonderful and magnificent truths that we have talked about in 2 Peter 1, verses 1-11:

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.

I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

(*NASB, 2 Peter 1:12-

15)

So, Peter is saying that it is his job to remind them again and again of what's true. He clearly says, "I know you know this. You know these truths. You believe these truths." But it's necessary to remind them. You can almost imagine he's anticipating the readers to say, "I know, I know." It's almost like, "You don't have to tell me again." You can almost imagine a parent having a conversation with a child and the child says, "I know, I know, I know." Maybe your children never said that. (laughter) You can imagine a child going out to play in the snow and the parent saying, "You know you've got to wear boots; you've got to wear gloves," and the child saying, "I know, I know, I know." And then ten minutes later you look out the window and they're outside without boots and without gloves! And you're thinking, "You don't know, or you'd be wearing boots and gloves. That's why I keep reminding you."

Peter has a concern that these people are being persuaded by the false teachers, so he continues to remind them what's true. It's interesting the word know in verse 12—you already know—we've talked that this is a significant word for Peter in 2 Peter, but this is a different Greek word. This is not the word we've seen to know—kind of experientially and to live out. This is a word that would be closer to what we would call head-knowledge; so, he's identifying that you know it in your head. If I was to give you a quiz, you would pass it but I'm not sure you really know it, because its kind of seems like you're being influenced by the teaching of the false teachers. So, he considers it right as long as he's in this earthly dwelling, literally earthly tent, to remind you.

He says he believes his death is imminent, so essentially Peter is using a metaphor that his body is like a tent and he's living in this tent, but he's about to lay it aside. That's actually a clothing metaphor. He's about to take off the body and he clearly says his death is imminent, as was told to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether he's referring to John 21 when Jesus told him that he would not die of old age but actually be crucified, or whether there's been some communication more recently, but he clearly knows he's about to die. I believe he knows how he's going to die; he's about to give his life for the cause. But he's concerned once he's gone, will these people remember the truth knowing the false teachers are among them?

In verse 15 he says he needs to be diligent before his departure to remind them of the truth. That's the third time we've seen this Greek word diligent. We had it in verse 5, in verse 10 and now we have it here. Basically, in verses 5 and 10, we as believers need to be diligent to understand and believe the truth—to remember what's true. Peter says then he needs to be diligent to remind them of what's true. In a sense, that's why we gather week in and week out. We gather to worship; we gather to encourage one another, but we also gather to remember what's true. It's my job to be diligent to remind you; it's your job to be diligent to listen, to understand, and to believe, because every day all of us are bombarded with hundreds of messages that aren't true. The false teachers are all around us and it's critically important that we remember what's true.

So that's the first paragraph. Starting in verse 16 he moves the discussion to the source of truth. Where's Peter getting his truth? And that of course contrasts the false teachers. Verse 16:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (Vs. 16-18)

So, Peter is saying that his source of truth comes from Jesus Himself. He is one of the core disciples that got the message directly from Jesus Himself. Now, little by little this band of apostles is dying off. This group that could say, "I got it directly from Jesus Himself," is becoming fewer and fewer. But Peter is identifying Jesus as his source of truth. Specifically, what he is referring to here is what we call the Transfiguration. It is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was a moment when Jesus invited only three of the apostles—Peter, James, and John—to come with Him up on an unknown mountain, and there Jesus began to transfigure, meaning He began to change into His glorified state. Literally, Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus as He will be glorified in His return, as a reminder of the promise that Jesus is coming back. It does seem one of the major themes of the false teachers is this idea that Jesus is coming back is just a myth, that it's not really true. So, Peter says he didn't make up some fairy tale. It's not a myth. All of the Greek religions were full of fables and myths. That's what dominated the Greek religions, and Peter is using a very strategic word to say this isn't some sort of a fable or a myth. It's not something that I just made up. All of the world religions today would have beliefs, but the question is: where do those beliefs come from? They could be just made up. They could just be fantasies. They could just be myths. Peter is saying, "I got it directly from Jesus Himself. As a matter of fact, I was both an eyewitness and an ear witness. I actually heard God say, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.'" As a matter of fact, when he says, "...we ourselves heard this," it's what we call the emphatic in Greek. He's kind of underscoring, "I heard it with my own ears; I saw it with my own eyes." That is the origin of this truth that he teaches.

In 1979 Pope John Paul II came to America. When he came to America, he came to the city of Chicago. I happened to be living in Chicago at the time. It was a big deal! I remember one day walking home from work, I noticed a huge crowd gathering on the street in front of a Catholic church. Being the clever sleuth that I am, I put it together. The Pope must be coming. So, I stood on the curb with hundreds, soon to be thousands of people and just waited. Pretty soon the police escorts, the police cars and limousines came flying through. There must have been a dozen black limousines. They all stopped, and as luck would have it, exactly in front of me, not twenty feet away, the limousine doors opened and out steps John Paul II! He looked right at us. He waved and said, "Hi Bryan!" (Laughter) Okay, I made that part up, (Laughter) but the rest is true. Pretty soon he was surrounded by people, and they took him into the church.

Now that was 1979. So, as I tell that story today, there may be people that say, "I don't think that's true." There may be people that say, "I don't think John Paul II even existed." You might say, "I don't think he ever came to America; I don't think he ever came to Chicago, and I don't think he ever visited that church." You're free to hold your opinion but what I would say is, "I was there. I stood on the curb and I saw him. I was an eye witness to the event." Now part of what you have to assess is my own character and integrity. Peter is saying he's about to die for the cause of Christ. All the apostles except John, other than Judas, were executed for their belief in a resurrected Christ. Not a single one of them backed off. Not a single one of them recanted. Every single one of them died, filled with hope in their belief in a resurrected and returning Christ. Peter's about to die for the sake of the Gospel, so do you think in this moment he's just making it up or wouldn't there be credibility in his words? Given what you know about me, my life, my character, my integrity, do you really think I'm standing up here lying to you? Or isn't it more likely I actually did see that?

Now the distance between 1979 and this morning is almost exactly the distance between when Peter saw the transfiguration and then the resurrection of Christ and when he's writing this letter. So, you tell me, "What is the chance that Peter's telling the truth versus the possibility he's lying and he's willing to die for a lie?"

Arnie: Bryan, when it comes to our claims to truth, how does Christianity differ from other belief systems?

Bryan: Yeah, so specifically when it comes to claims to truth, it would have to do with things like accuracy and reliability of the message, which can be investigated through science, archeology, history, fulfilled prophecy, things like that. At the core is a claim of an historical event of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which can be investigated. It can be determined at least to a pretty high degree, whether that's true or not. And then I think changed lives. The evidence of changed lives over hundreds of years is evidence that the message is supernatural. And it's true.

Cara: There's a lot of historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. So, First Corinthians 15 says that He appeared to the disciples and to more than 500 of the brothers and to Paul. Those are

all eyewitness accounts. So, what other historical documents point out the facts of the Resurrection?

Bryan: Yeah, so there's so much evidence. I've often said, I think it's more difficult to dismiss the resurrection of Christ than it is to believe the resurrection of Christ. So, I would put all of the New Testament in that category. There is no reason to say they're not historical documents. The Gospels are historical documents. They meet every criterion for that, and they clearly affirm belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. And almost all the New Testament's written well within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses of the events, so if Christianity is going to fall apart, it would have fallen apart in the First Century, with hundreds of witnesses saying, "This isn't true", but that's not what happened. Beyond that, there's extra biblical writings that affirm the claim of a resurrected Messiah: the early church creeds that started just probably a few months after the resurrection of Jesus - certainly within a few years - that affirm a belief in a crucified and risen Messiah. And we have copies of those creeds. So, the evidence is pretty overwhelming that there was a belief that Jesus died and rose again. And it's hard to find anyone in the First Century that was coming forth and saying, "I have evidence this isn't true."

Arnie: So, we also have several Old Testament prophecies, don't we, about predicting Christ's birth, His crucifixion and resurrection?

Bryan: Yeah, so there's some debate about how many messianic prophecies there are, but a lot of people put it 70 plus, all perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. And many of those were outside of His ability to control. So, it isn't like He was just reading the checklist and doing those things. Most of those were things He couldn't control but perfectly fulfilled all of them.

Cara: Well you bring up the Old Testament. I think some dismiss the Old Testament as just kind of this archaic history. But, when you consider that the whole Old Testament points to Christ over and over again, you see the prophecies and then the New Testament comes along as a fulfillment. You also see Jesus pointing back to the Old Testament, so it's all one cohesive account of truth.

Bryan: Yeah. So, it's one unfolding story full of pictures, images, prophecies, shadows, ultimately fulfilled in Christ. But it can get confusing. And I think people make a lot of theological errors when they're trying to figure out how does the Old Testament apply to life today? So, it does take some study and it certainly does get confusing.

Cara: I just did a Bible study that showed how Christ met all these prophecies in that. And it is just truly amazing. You know, I started with the Resurrection, but then to back up and go back into the Old Testament. It's just truly amazing.

Bryan: It is. And most of those were things he couldn't control, things like where he was born and what Pilate did and what Herod did.

Cara: Really good to know the facts about the truth of the Gospel. But what would you say to someone then who still refuses to believe in Jesus even after they've heard all of the truth? How do you handle that?

Bryan: So, I can't make anyone believe. I'm responsible to be a faithful messenger. I have to love them. But until the Spirit of God does the necessary work to remove the blinders, I can't change that. So, we've talked about this before, but we always have to remember the goal is not to win an argument, it's to win a soul. So, I have my part and then the rest has to be up to God.

Cara: So, knowing the facts in your head isn't really the same as truly knowing and believing in Jesus.

Bryan: Yeah. So, they're not the same. And that's a really big deal in a place like America where we've been so saturated with the Gospel, as a lot of people know Christmas and Easter, but they don't really believe it. They can just articulate the details. So, James told us, even the demons believe that, and we know that they're not saved. So, some sort of intellectual ascent is not the same as placing your trust in Jesus as Savior. You know, Peter talks a lot about suffering and persecution, and I think the more suffering and persecution there is, the more it separates cultural Christians from those who truly believe.